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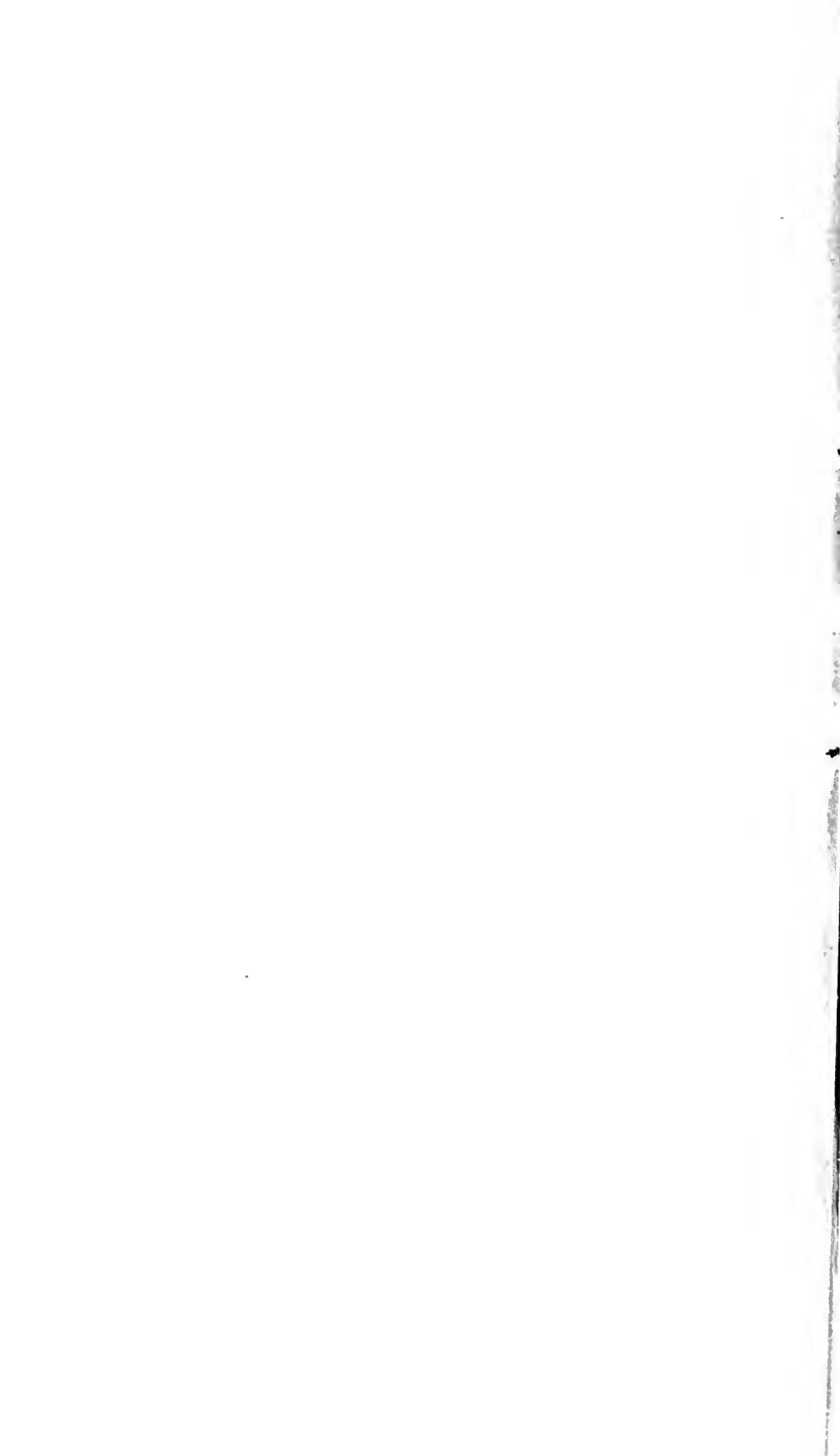
## **ENGLAND'S STRENGTH IN ASIA**

BY

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## ENGLAND'S STRENGTH IN ASIA

It seems to me not altogether inappropriate that we should conclude the session of this Society with something of a general review of England's position as an Asiatic Power, and the possibility of any serious modification or change in that position which may be brought about by the march of those great events which are making history in the Far East. It is our endeavour that here, at least, should be recorded from time to time the opinions of those who have had the best and widest opportunities for observing the passing changes of Asiatic politics, absolutely independent of their local position in any Parliamentary arena, only giving at first-hand impressions and opinions which have been gathered, as far as possible, straight from free Asiatic fields. We are nothing here if not original observers, and it is just that quality of originality which gives this society such value as it possesses. I will not, therefore, apologize for offering you a few opinions, crude and imperfect though they may be, which can at least claim the merit of being based on personal observation.

I have always held the belief that England's strength in Asia is greater than that which the majority of Englishmen are disposed to admit, if we are to judge by Parliamentary utterances and military warnings. The general tendency is undoubtedly to depreciate our strength and the value of our local geographical position. It is somewhat curious that, whilst we pride ourselves on being level-headed people as a rule, we seem so often to miss the golden mean of appreciation which is the true criterion of level-headedness, falling into the double error of overconfidence at one time and a miserable want of it at another; balancing our

military policy between foolhardiness and timidity. I need not recall historical examples to prove my point ; I will only, and very shortly, draw your attention to a few of those factors in the Asiatic field of political contention which appear to me to be chiefly overlooked.

In the first place, what do we mean by strength ? Strength may be political and moral, or it may be military and physical ; it may depend on area or geographical position, on population or on wealth ; and as all these conditions are more or less interdependent, acting and reacting on one another, we get a tolerably complicated problem before us, admitting undoubtedly of very wide divergences of opinion in detail, and too complicated to admit of our doing more than touching on a few broad principles this evening. Politically and morally, then, how does England stand in Asia ? What is the value of English prestige relatively to other Asiatic Powers ? Naturally it will not be admitted in Asia, beyond the geographical limits of our political influence, that we hold a paramount position. We need not expect it. Amongst Asiatic peoples political opinions are even more a matter of education than they are in Europe. The average Asiatic believes only what he is taught. He has no basis for independent opinion, unless some big war involves him in personal action and new lessons are impressed by physical force. Thus, comparative prestige becomes, under normal conditions, a question of geographical position.

Throughout India, to the borders of the Indian Empire, the ‘izzat’ of the ‘Sarkar’—the prestige of the British Government—is undoubtedly supreme. Nothing short of a successful invasion of the peninsula would ever affect this conviction, which is born of educated observation, and is not exactly an expression of loyalty so much as a belief in the inevitable dispositions of Providence, which has arranged that England should rule Asia. It is important to note the distinction. People discuss the loyalty of the Indian native without clearly defining what is meant by the term. Personal loyalty there is, and it has its quality of reverence, almost of affection. Few English people, I

think, understand the sentiment with which our late Queen was regarded in India, and even beyond India. In Tibet Queen Victoria is an incarnation. She still lives there as a truly beneficent influence, albeit under an unpleasant form. In the utmost wilds of the Central India jungles I have been able to recognise the same sentiment. I doubt if the ‘great white Queen’ is dead to the famished women-kind of the Gond aborigines, who daily place their little swings of twigs and sticks by the wayside with a scanty offering of rice to propitiate the great mother (*mata*) who comes into their houses and carries away, gently and happily, the child who has died of small-pox ; and the war-worn *sowar*, who can only remember, of all that he had seen in England, that the Queen spoke to him in Hindustani, and who would have given his life to serve her as cheerfully as any Japanese soldier for his Emperor, is only one of many such. There *is* personal loyalty in India, deep and strong, but there is beyond that loyalty a practical faith in the length and strength of England’s arm, mingled with a light-hearted contempt for the might of other nations, which is not always shared by the Englishman.

If, on the other hand, we could transfer ourselves from India to Russia in Asia (it is inevitable that we should take Russia for comparison), we should find widespread exactly the same belief in Russian prestige, but not the same sentiment of personal loyalty. In Asia the Czar is hardly a human ideal. The sort of academic faith, unsupported by sentiment, which Russian methods propagate, is apt to be rudely shaken under stress of reverse and loss. I firmly believe that the fighting capacity of Russia’s Asiatic soldiers has been largely discounted by the first successful blow struck by an Asiatic Power and the consequent loss of prestige. That they should fight on at all, and fight so well under a flag for which they never have had, and never could have, any affection now that its prestige has been so fatally damaged, is to me an unexpected thing, and one of which we may take due count when reckoning up the staying powers of our own Asiatic troops.

Turning to the intermediate buffer states lying between Russia and India—the frontier kingdoms of Afghanistan, Baluchistan, Persia, and Tibet—we may reckon that our prestige is exactly in proportion to the spread of our influence, and we cannot but expect that the native rulers of these states should live in a state of half-hearted expectancy, waiting upon events to determine their course of action under any given circumstances. It is of no use for us to pretend that we depend on the Shah, or the Amir, or on any discredited Grand Lama, for a whole-hearted alliance to us and our cause, nor even for much respect for political agreements and treaties, unless we make it clear that it is worth his while to back us, and for this we must depend on the maintenance of our prestige ; and this prestige—our moral strength—will ultimately depend on the clear outward and visible evidence that we are physically strong. Not for an instant do I suppose that the minds of these frontier chiefs are to be influenced by the ephemeral political persuasions of this or that Viceroy. They will only listen to reason when reason is backed by sound artillery and the latest fashion of small arms ; and in estimating the position of England in Asia from the point of view of her political influence and moral suasion, the trans-frontier borderland can only safely be considered as an indeterminate factor.

Whilst on this subject, we may ask, What will be the effect of Japan's crushing victories over her European foe on *British* prestige ? Shall *we* suffer, as a European Power, as undoubtedly, in a much larger degree, Russia will suffer ? Will our frontier and trans-frontier allies turn to us with greater confidence, or will they think that they, too, may emulate Japanese success hereafter by adopting Japanese methods ? Of the effects so far as Russia is concerned there can be no doubt at all ; but the Afghan or Baluch chief will certainly appraise the position more clearly than we do, and will not miss the point (so frequently ignored in England) that the Russian army is Asiatic rather than European, and that the fight is largely a fight between Mohammedan and infidel, in which the members

of the true faith are distinctly coming off second best. My own impression is that the result of the war will lead to but little change in trans-frontier sentiment. The bigoted Afghan prefers the Christian, with his alien faith and his incomprehensible politics (but whom he can respect, sharing the Old Testament with him, and giving him credit for a real if a misguided belief in the greatness of Allah), to the yellow infidel, who has no belief at all, and with whom he has absolutely nothing in common. He will hate the Jap as he hates the Gurkha or the Sikh, to whom he accords a shorter shrift in the hour of trial than he ever deals out to the European. It is well to remember that race antagonism is far more bitter between Asiatic nationalities than between the Asiatic and the European. Were it not so, we should not be in India now. I doubt much whether a definite alliance with Japan will raise us much in the estimation of our frontier neighbours, although, as soldiers by heredity and right, they will marvel at the military capacity shown by this new and incomprehensible Asiatic Power, and will fully appreciate the astuteness of those who have made good use of it to fight their battles for them. Knowing something of the limits of Afghan perception, I consider it inevitable that they should regard us as immensely clever, but not over-conscientious as allies.

The larger question of how far the qualities of loyalty and faith in our prestige make material for cohesion, and their influence on our military strength, we will for a moment defer.

It will be conceded that our moral prestige and our military strength are largely interdependent, and when we come to this point we may as well accept the necessity of reckoning up our military strength, and of comparing our resources with those of our only serious rival in Asia. And we will, if you please, ignore the possibility of a combination of purely Asiatic Powers against us as too remote a contingency to be usefully considered now.

It has always been a surprise to me that there should be men of light and leading in this country who, to judge

by their utterances or their writings, are actually afraid of Russia—afraid that, with her vast resources in men and money, and the development of her railway system to the borders of Afghanistan, she can thereby peril our security in India by a general advance across the Oxus. We will, for the purpose of estimating our comparative strength, set aside the results of the present war with Japan, treating them as a passing rather than a permanent influence on Russian capacity for further military action in Asia, although it appears to me that there are ample reasons for assuming that many a long year will pass ere she will again be in a position to assume an offensive attitude on a large scale. We are dealing with the question of our own strength in Asia, and as it is impossible to treat such a question from the purely abstract rather than the relative point of view, we must take it for granted that the statements of these military experts to whom we are so often called to listen (but who have for the most part but a theoretical basis for their assumptions) are true.

We will suppose that Russia is in a position to distribute a force of 500,000 men at the termini of her Central Asian railway system on the Herat frontier and on the banks of the Oxus facing Afghan Turkestan, and that she could, if she so pleased, occupy the great plains which constitute Afghan Turkestan to the south of the Oxus and to the north of the mountains which extend from the Hindu Kush to the Persian frontier without serious difficulty. Under normal conditions such a supposition is certainly not unjustifiable, although, in my opinion, it requires considerable modification. It is only wise, however, to accept it in full in estimating the balance of power and formulating our own position in India. The possibility of facing such a condition is our criterion of strength or weakness. Now what constitutes military strength apart from moral prestige? Geographical position, in the first place; the sinews of war—men and money—in the second; fighting capacity in the third. At any rate, we shall have no time to go further than this into the question to-day. It has often appeared to me a marvellous circumstance that

England, protected as she is by sea from foreign invasions, should have secured to herself so much of the world's surface almost equally well protected by geographical barriers, a fact which really goes much further to account for the British Empire than is at first sight perceptible. India, with her long-extended land border, is a notable instance of this remarkable feature of protective geography. There is no borderland in the world like that of India. The Alps and the Andes are as nothing compared to the gigantic Asiatic upheavals which, in bands and battalions of serried mountain ranges and desolate, wind-swept plateau, divide off the Indian peninsula from the steppes and plains of Central Asia. From China and Tibet on the east through the Pamir uplands to Kashmir, the geographical wall, or series of walls, is so complete that not even in the remote historic periods of human history can we trace any record of a successful passing southwards of those Asiatic hordes who, unopposed, were constantly seeking more favoured climes and everlastinglly beating at the golden gates of Ind.

If any people would have successfully carried their arms through that mountain band into India it would have been the Chinese. And they did succeed in getting farther than any other people, but they never really broke the back of the Himalayas. Nothing yet has occurred in the process of the world's development to make that task any easier. Railways and roads may effect much elsewhere, but railways and roads across the Himalayan ranges (anywhere, in short, to the east of Kabul in Afghanistan) would, I think, be almost impossible, even under conditions of absolute peace and security, and with the goodwill of the people on both sides pressed into their construction. From the Himalayas we pass to the much-discussed Hindu Kush, and here we encounter a weak link in our line of geographical protection. We know perfectly well that from the days of Alexander to those of the Moghul, the Hindu Kush has been crossed north of Kabul, Kabul itself reduced, and India invaded time after time. Kabul, indeed, is the historic gate to India. But through all these rather misty records, can we

find any trace of an organized defence of those natural barriers which form the real bulwark of the Kabul plains ? I know of none. I am aware that this is a much-discussed link in our geographical barrier of Northern India, but I can only give you my personal opinion, from a fairly close and practical acquaintance with that memorable country, that the occupation of Kabul as a base for further advance on India can only be achieved again if we are kind enough to sit still and allow of its accomplishment without serious interference. And so we may proceed round the circle westward, finding no convenient crack in the geographical armour of our northern defence works till we come to the valley of Herat.

For the benefit of those who are not well acquainted with the map of India, I must explain that this mountain barrier which we have been following round from the Chinese frontier is to the south of Afghan Turkestan, which lies between it and the Oxus River. It affords no protection whatever to these Oxus plains which we have assumed, just for the sake of argument, to be at the mercy of Russia. It is not until we reach Herat that we come to a real open way—the true line of least resistance between Central Asia and India. Here, for the first time, our geographical dispositions for defence fail us, and we cannot but recognise that from Herat southward to Kandahar or to Sistan, on the western flank of Baluchistan, we have a possible line of approach to India, which requires all our attention and all our resources to close. Personally, I do not believe in any serious threat to our borders from any other point but this ; for it is here and here only that men can be successfully massed in large numbers, and the issue fought out on the open plains. It is Herat and Kandahar and Sistan and Quetta which call for armies and oblige us to reckon up our resources in men lest perchance we should be found wanting when the time should come to exhibit our strength.

Nature, then, has so arranged her geographical distributions of mountain and plain that we may look on India as we look on our own country as most exceptionally favoured

for defence against outside aggression. But we must not lose sight of the weak points of our position. Were there no weak points we might sit still comfortably and pursue the policy of masterly inaction. But we are faced with the fact that there is a comparatively open way (it is not an easy way) in Western Afghanistan, or in Eastern Persia, which requires more than watching. It requires the distribution of proper scientific means of defence and the maintenance of an army to make use of the means. There is no possibility of shirking this point. We must have an army in India, and it must be an army fully equal to any that can be brought against it. Anything short of this is to invite attack. Let me guard against misconception. I have already stated that, in my opinion, the valley of Herat and the broad plains of Balkh—all that constitutes Afghan Turkestan in short—is practically at the mercy of Russia as things stand. But we are, perhaps, a little too much in a hurry to undervalue the capacity of the Afghan for holding his own, just as we undoubtedly undervalued the Japanese. Afghan material in fighting-men is splendid material. I can imagine none better. Man for man, the Afghan is fully a match for the frontier tribesman whom Russia puts into the field against him. But we do not know what his present value in the aggregate as a fighting machine may be. Twenty years ago he was not able to hold his own against properly-led troops for a day. He had no leading and no confidence in his officers; two essential qualifications for success. He may have improved since those days—probably has improved; but all the same I should doubt whether the military system of Afghanistan has done more yet than make him a most valuable auxiliary for irregular mountain warfare. He could not stand against properly manoeuvred battalions in the plains in spite of his personal courage. Of this, however, we may be sure. The occupation of these northern provinces would take time—a considerable time—and the necessary construction of railways and supporting lines of communication (without which the advance of a large force southwards would be impossible) would all be so much advertisement of

further proceedings, and give us breathing space to prepare for them.

We may turn now to the question of England's strength in men and money to meet any emergency, likely or unlikely —for I insist that we cannot wait till the emergency is probable—that may call for its exhibition.

We are in the habit of talking a little wildly about Russia's millions as if millions of men meant overwhelming strength. If millions of men are scattered over millions of square miles of territory, with thousands of miles of frontier to look after, they do not, after all, loom large in any one section of it; and under any circumstances these millions are dependent on population. There must be a definite limit. It is, then, to the purpose to recall to your minds the fact that Russia, all told, can only muster about 150,000,000 of people. We have very nearly double that number (290,000,000) in India alone, and it is with India that we are just now concerned. Mere numbers, however, may mean very little. It is quite true that of our 290,000,000 a very large proportion are people of unwarlike races, who could hardly be guaranteed for purposes of soldiering, but we must remember that exactly the same may be said of Russia as a whole. In all large communities the proportion of the warrior caste must be comparatively small. Japan is no exception to the rule. We are not all warriors even in England. If we reckon up the population of those districts in India to which we are accustomed to look for our recruits; if we take into account the varied Mohammedan tribes of the long North-western Frontier, the Mohammedan of the Punjab and Hyderabad, the Sikhs of the plains, and the Gurkhas and Dogras of the hills, to say nothing of the Rajputs and the fighting races (and some of those of Madras may well take their place in the list)—that is to say, the people amongst whom fighting is a tradition and the military profession an hereditary right—we shall find at least 50,000,000 from whom we can draw our soldiers without indenting in the Bengali or the Parsee shopkeeper, or even the Hindu agriculturist, although it is from the latter class that some of the best of our

soldiers have been made. The proportion of natural fighting material in India is at least double that of Russia, look at it how you will, and yet we talk as if we could not make an army for want of men to make it with! What, then, is the difficulty? It will be said that, although we have the numbers, regarded as a raw product, we have not the means of inducing the necessary numbers to join the ranks, and consequently we have not a trained and disciplined army, even if we have the money wherewith to maintain it. This entirely depends on whether we limit ourselves to our present methods of inducement, our present ideas of military efficiency, and our old world standards. We may be disinclined to adopt Russian methods, we may discard the idea of compulsory service, we may still believe that an efficient soldier must measure a certain number of inches in girth and in height; but if we do this, I would point out that we are imposing our own artificial limits on our military strength. I maintain that the strength is all there, only we cannot persuade ourselves to utilize it as others do. For my own part, I do not believe that any form of compulsory service would be found necessary in the particular case which we are considering. A call to arms to meet a foreign invader would be responded to almost with enthusiasm. Should, indeed, any temporary measure of conscription become necessary under such circumstances, it would be received by the Asiatic in quite a different spirit to that accorded by the Englishman.

A war with Russia would be a popular war with the native soldier. To a great majority of the best of our Indian troops, it would be but the realization of their military ambition. It is a constant theme of conversation amongst them, and not only in India but even beyond the borders. The spirit which animated a newly-recruited battalion of Gurkhas, who not long ago went off disgusted to their homes when they found that they were not at once to be led against Russia, is the spirit of a great part of the Indian army in a greater or lesser degree. We may profess to be afraid of Russia. *They* are not. Like the Japanese Minister to whom it was suggested that there were many

points of similarity between England and Japan, they would say that fear of Russia is the only thing they are not prepared to share with us. It is at least within our power to insure that long before Russia had placed herself in a position to seriously threaten our borders we should possess an Indian army numerically quite equal to any that we should be asked to meet. Again, we shall hear that an army so constructed would have no military training comparable to that which it would have to meet, that we cannot fashion a soldier out of raw material in a day, and that an armed mob would be the result of a hastily-raised force. There is doubtless much to consider in such a suggestion ; but I am inclined to think that here again we must revise our ideas as to what constitutes military efficiency under the special geographical conditions with which we have to deal.

The lesson of our latest frontier war in Tirah was that 10,000 (even less, I believe, and I had special facilities for estimating their numbers) well-armed mountaineers, such as the Afridis, could keep four times their number of regulars quite sufficiently at arm's-length for an almost indefinite period even without scientific leading or strategic organization.

The lesson we ought to take to heart from the present war is even more to the purpose. Does anyone suppose that Japan has held a standing army of drilled and disciplined soldiers for years past—500,000, or, say, 700,000 men—in readiness for the present contingency? What she has had is a system of universal, or national, military training, tempered by selection of the fittest. This is very different from a standing army. The vast majority of her soldiers are but trained civilians, and it is this sort of training which might be applied with effect on our Indian frontier. Where we in England take two years to turn out a reputable cavalry trooper, a few months are sufficient in a country—like Argentina, for instance—where men learn to ride from their youth. The truth is that the methods, and the length of time, required for fashioning a suitable fighting force depends entirely upon circumstances,

and circumstances in mountainous Asia point to the attainment of efficiency by the process of selecting the quality of the material, and preparing it for special action, rather than by maintaining a large force all strictly turned out to the same pattern. The question of a large European force to fight a quasi-European foe is apropos to this consideration. To my mind this has always appeared to be a matter of sentiment rather than practical necessity. As a necessity it almost seems to imply a mistrust of Indian troops which I consider to be absolutely misplaced. This is not the time to enlarge on such a theme, but let me say once for all that I trust that all the silly nonsense which is sometimes talked about stiffening the native army with English bayonets is a thing of the past. British troops, invaluable as they are, and invincible as we believe them to be under conditions which suit them, should not be wasted when they are apt to be ineffective from physical causes. They are not, and they never will be, good mountaineers, for instance.

I fear that I am drifting too far into military considerations, but while on the subject of our military strength, I must just put in a word for our Asiatic allies. What could Afghanistan do in case of invasion? You may take it as absolutely certain that Afghanistan would declare against the first invader who violated the Afghan border, no matter who the invader may be. It is a great mistake (one that might cost us dearly) to underestimate the strength of Afghanistan, or to undervalue the splendid fighting materials which that country possesses. At a very moderate computation the Amir could put 100,000 men of all arms into the field, including excellent light infantry and artillery for mountain work, besides a fair contingent of serviceable, if irregular, cavalry—cavalry, that is to say, better mounted and equipped than the average Cossack, but not so amenable to discipline. But Afghan troops, however excellent the raw material may be, want discipline and leading, and that they can only get by the importation of instruction from outside. That they will get it is certain—Afghanistan is not standing still; but time will

be necessary for the adoption of any new system in a country like Afghanistan, and meanwhile Afghan military efficiency is at a discount. Eventually Afghanistan may admit of European instruction, and we know that the young British officer is unmatched in all the world for his capacity to turn native raw material into good fighting stuff. Here, unfortunately, is a possible weak link in England's chain of defensive armour. Where are the young officers to come from ? That unlimited supply which appeared a few years ago to be inexhaustible shows symptoms of running short. There is an unfortunate spirit of unrest, which is ominous of a difficulty in filling up vacancies as they occur. Indeed, there are not wanting signs that it is in the ranks of the officers rather than in those of the men that the real shortage is to be feared. Let us hope that this will pass, and that some means will be found of making the best of all our excellent voluntary material without necessarily exacting a universal standard of ability as the one great criterion of efficiency.

As for our intra-peninsular allies, the rulers of the native states of India, we ought to know their sentiments and aspirations by this time. The one prominent feature in their policy lately has been the readiness of a great majority of them to give us all the assistance they can in time of trouble. I do not mean to say that they altogether love us, or that they love British rule, but they are wise enough, educated, and enlightened enough, to know when they are well off, and to see that no other rule at present is possible. They are no longer an ignorant and impulsive race of irresponsible rulers. To suppose that they would willingly exchange British rule for Russian, after what they have seen lately of the latter, is simply an absurdity. We should certainly have their backing, and such assistance as they could render if we wanted it—at any rate, until we muddled ourselves into a disastrous mess—which Heaven forbid ! Into such a question as the nature and extent of such assistance I have no time to enter. I have, I trust, proved my point that as regards numbers we are essentially strong in Asia, and I hope I have made my opinion clear that in

the matter of military efficiency of these numbers, we have absolutely nothing to fear if, without maintaining an enormous standing army, we carefully watch the signs of the times and know beforehand how and where to make our demands with the certainty of a satisfactory response. This is purely a question of military administration which we need not pursue further.

But there is another factor in the strength of a nation which will have occurred to you all. It is, perhaps, the most important of all. We have seen a comparatively small and a peace-loving people (unmilitary according to their own showing), a people devoted to the acts and graces of social life, suddenly rise to a military pre-eminence after a fashion which has almost no parallel in the world's history—certainly none in modern history. These makers of fans and lovers of flowers, conscientious artists in ivory carvings, and enthusiastic workers in the potter's field—a small people, who would pass no tests for physical measurement in height or girth—what is it that has made them great as a fighting nation? Religious enthusiasm, the symbol of the cross, or the banner of Islam has accounted for much in the military annals of the world. It is not that—there is no spirit of fanaticism in Japan. The mad lust for conquest and greed for loot has sent many a scourging army across Asia. It is not that; there is no bloodthirstiness, no greed in Japan. Perhaps we know what it is without being able to define it. The encircling bonds of pure-hearted patriotism, the spirit of self-sacrificing devotion to country, the sentiments, the passion, aroused by endangered nationality and of outraged independence, stirring the man as it stirs the heart of the individual, sinking the individual in the mass and amalgamating the whole—all that we know, in fact, of patriotism in the truest and highest sense of the word—this is at the bottom of their efficiency, the very bed-rock of the whole structure of their irresistible military strength. Are we then strong in Asia as Japan is strong? Have we combined all the varied elements of Indian nationality into one homogeneous whole, with one faith in their rulers and one impelling spirit of

patriotism to move them ? It would be ridiculous to maintain that we have done so. We have not even shown them what it means. Is the spirit of patriotism so freely abroad in this country that we can point a moral and call for imitation ? Where do we find it ? In those unseemly exhibitions of party faction which disgrace parliamentary procedure ? In trades unions and strikes for less work and more pay ? In the countless resignations of army commissions which are sent in because more is demanded of an officer in the way of professional capacity than he is disposed to accede ? I fear that we are not such brilliant examples at home of the living principle of patriotism that we can pose as a fine moral example to the East. And yet we all know, all of us here, that, weak as our power of national expression may be, and lamentably deficient as is its appearance in the councils of the Empire, it is there all the same ; and it is the very knowledge of its existence, deep-seated and unimperilled by the storm of party faction, that renders us all so careless about its appearance on the surface. Any national peril at once reveals it, as did the Boer War ; but under the ordinary routine of the country's daily life it is difficult sometimes to detect. It is not our national characteristic to wave our flag and to call attention to our assets of loyalty and patriotism. We think we can take all that for granted, and that it matters not what others think about it. I believe this to be absolutely wrong. It matters very much what the Indian native thinks about it. Remember that he can only judge by appearances. I particularly dwell on this point, for I believe it to be at the very root of the question of our strength in Asia. It is the basis of the strength of Japan beyond all contradiction. It ought to be so with us. Do we take the least trouble to inculcate the principles of patriotism *ab initio* in our elementary schools, either in England or in India ?

Do we ever attempt to hold together the infinitely varied units of which we are destined to constitute a powerful and Imperial nationality by the strong and binding force of education ? A child is always a little patriot at heart. Teach him to love the sight of his country's flag, to sing

patriotic hymns from his earliest beginnings, and you will have that which you find in the South American republics—a strong and intense fervour of patriotism developed for each separate state, although the original and varied stock from which all these patriots are derived may be essentially the same in all states. If you want a child to become a British patriot, teach him to love the British flag. If you want him to love England, appeal to his imagination, teach him something of the romances of England's patron saint, St. George, and let him know the English flag when he sees it. It is in this connection that I regard all these new societies, lately formed for the preservation of Imperial unity, as most essentially useful. The pity is that they usually deal with old, sundried, and unimpressionable people instead of with the enthusiastic natures of the young. We must shake off something of our hard, practical, armour-clad methods, and learn again that sentiment, sheer sentiment and idealism, have been at the root of all victorious feats of arms from the days of Helen of Troy until the spirits of Japanese ancestors looked down on the victory of the Sea of Japan. What I have said of English education is doubly true of India. In all the broadcast elementary schools which are scattered through that land of sentiment, I have never once seen an Imperial symbol—never once heard a loyal hymn from the lips of Indian children. Nevertheless, when all is said, I maintain that there *is* loyalty in India, and there is belief in British prestige. There is not half the loyalty there might be, but such as it is, it places us in a position of distinct superiority to Russia, and makes us comparatively strong.

As to what would happen if Russia made a serious move towards India by the invasion of Afghanistan, I have little now to say, though I think I have formulated clear notions (to myself, at least) of what would actually happen. Only one point must be impressed on you to-night—*i.e.*, that the first move must meet with a response. We cannot sit still and wait upon events, however convenient it may be to do so. A waiting policy is never a winning policy in the East. We must act, and we must know well before-

hand what that action is to be under given circumstances. We must act, not because—as some advisers seem inclined to affirm—not because we are afraid of unrest and disaffection, and perhaps of a rising in India, the instant we are threatened on our remote borderland, for there would be no rising. For that matter, there never has been a rising of the Indian masses. Not even in the dark days of the Mutiny did the people rise (as they are rising in Russia, for instance), or we should not be in India now. Not, surely, because we are afraid of another mutiny amongst our troops?

For reasons into which I cannot enter here, such a disgrace would be practically impossible. To me the idea that Indian troops would become unsteady in face of the one eventuality for which they have lived their lives and learned their work is not merely an absurdity—it is a criminal absurdity; for it means that we do not believe in our Indian army, and if we do not believe in them, how are we to expect that they will believe in us? In the event of a war with Russia, we should be asking Mohammedan troops to assist a Mohammedan nation (Afghanistan) to repel a foreign invader. Where does the incentive for disobedience come in? I fail to see it. It is a ridiculous and pernicious suggestion. Let us say no more about it. We should have to act because there would be a wave of indignation against us throughout the country whose interests we have undertaken to protect, if we did not help them.

I have been told that the Afghan would view with horror the approach of British troops marching to his assistance in his country, foreseeing that ultimate division of it between England and Russia which would destroy for ever his national dependence. I have only time to protest against what I conceive to be a total misapprehension of the position. To begin with, the Afghan knows well enough by this time that we don't wish, and don't mean, to burden ourselves with his country if we can help it. He knows nothing of the sort about Russia. But what he expects at all costs is that a professed ally should be true

to his engagements and help him with the material help of his troops and his guns. If you do not believe it, remember, at least, what I have seen. I have seen the Afghan bitterly, dangerously, disgusted because we did not help him at Panjdeh ; and, in spite of that most melancholy failure, I have seen him turn out in thousands to sweep away his own villages, clear out broadcast his own cemeteries, destroy his own hallowed mosques, break down his cherished religious symbols—all at the bidding of English engineers—for the purpose of confronting a Russian foe and with the enthusiastic hope of ultimate support from a British escort. I have held council with Afghan generals as to what they could do in combination with British troops to hold their own against a Russian advance. With a force behind them of the most fanatical of all Afghan tribesmen (Duranis chiefly), they decided at once, not only that we could work together with right goodwill, but that they were confident and hopeful of a successful issue, provided we English engineers directed the defence of Herat. What more do you want ? You need not ask me to believe, after that, that the Afghan would resent our assistance. I ask you to believe that he would be dangerously indignant if we did not offer it. The danger would be that he would give us up as hopeless, and finally combine with Russia.

The question of *what* we should do is another story altogether, into which we cannot possibly enter. I have indicated briefly that which I consider the weak line of resistance in our defence, and I can do no more here and now ; but just that brief indication should be enough to convince you that I am no advocate for a policy of unpreparedness, a drifting policy of letting things slide. I *know* that we have a weak side to our armour ; I have had the opportunity of seeing it from every possible point of view, and, knowing it, I know also that it is essential that we should strengthen it by all available means, keeping our stout little frontier army up with full strength in men and material, improving our defensive works by all scientific methods, employing nothing but the latest and best of offensive

weapons, and preserving a wise counsel of thorough understanding with our frontier allies as to where and how we shall strike if the time ever comes to strike. Above all must we foster those germs of loyalty and patriotism which undoubtedly exist in India. What I deprecate so strongly is the notion that we are weak in Asia ; that we have anything to be afraid of ; that we must maintain a huge and costly army like the army of Russia ; that we want masses of European troops to enable us to hold our own ; and that we shall have no unity of action, no support from those who have everything to gain by supporting us and everything to lose by our discomfiture, an idea which to me is as preposterous as it is mischievous. But, when all is said, I can only conclude as I began by expressing my conviction that it will be long yet ere we are called on for decisive action. I may be wrong, but I cannot believe in the mad-dog policy on the part of Russia of courting further disaster under the most unfavourable conditions by striking at India because she has been defeated by Japan. I have too much faith in Russia still to believe it. Yet we must be prepared, because readiness for action is our best security for peace.

Once again I would like to refer to the brighter alternative which our undoubted strength in Asia at present and Russia's disasters seem faintly to point—the alternative of a good understanding with her ; of the realization of an agreement which shall be of mutual benefit to us both ; the linking up of railway systems which will promote international commerce (which, at the worst, will give her no more facility for approaching India than it will give us for preventing such an approach), and will at once outflank all the complications of Afghan and Persian policy ; complete understanding with those countries, too, based on mutual commercial interest, and that security for peace and relief from the everlasting burden of nervousness about India which can only be obtained by the development of such interests—all of which we are told is quite outside the pale of practical politics. It may be so, but I am not convinced. Already I think I see in the Far East a faint white light

betokening the dawn of a brighter day—a day of which the coming has been heralded by the extraordinary success of a powerful and self-contained ally—a success which creates a new era in the world's history, and must inevitably lead to a total redistribution in the balance of political power in Asia.

## DISCUSSION.

SIR ALFRED LYALL : I have listened with great pleasure and profit to the excellent lecture which Sir Thomas Holdich has given to us, and in expressing my appreciation of his kindness I should like to say a few words. I entirely agree with his views with regard to the only vulnerable frontier of India, and I consider that he has properly and fairly represented the strength of England in Asia to meet any possible emergency that may arise. His lecture has served to clear our heads and strengthen our hearts in case of danger. If the time should come—I hope it may never come—when England and Russia have to fight for the debatable land of Central Asia, England will be able to give a good account of herself. With her base on the sea and her resources for recruiting her army from all parts of the British Empire, she has nothing to fear from Russia.

I have always believed, and all who really know believe, that our real frontier in Asia is the boundary of Afghanistan. We are pledged to defend Afghanistan, and it is vital to us to keep a foreign enemy out of the Amir's country. Looking back over all history, we find that every invader who has penetrated with success into India was obliged to secure a solid basis of operations in Afghanistan. It was the case with Alexander the Great. As soon as he was in India difficulties arose on his rear, and he was obliged to go back and settle the marauding tribes. Perhaps one reason which led to his determination to return home by sea was the difficulty he was likely to experience as to communications, supplies, and resources, through the mountainous tribes to the west of India. The Moghul Baber could do nothing—and he made five invasions—until he was sure of Afghanistan. As soon as he lost Afghanistan he lost India. When Nadir Shah came down on India he first wrested the province of Afghanistan. A consideration of the historical, geographical, and military aspects of the case shows that it is essential and vital for our strategy to maintain the military command of Afghanistan, because those who hold Afghanistan hold the only gate of access by land to India.

I wish Sir Thomas Holdich had had time to give us more particulars of those parts and places of which he has a more intimate knowledge than any living Englishman, and regret that he has not dealt more fully with the borderland question on which he is so

capable an authority. But we are exceedingly grateful for what he has done. He has certainly reassured us on several important points, and I sincerely share the hope he expressed in concluding his lecture that eventually a mutual understanding will be reached between England and Russia in Asia.

MR. J. D. REES: It is comforting to those of us who have thought that the Russian spectre with regard to India has been greatly exaggerated to find that two such authorities as Sir Thomas Holdich and Sir Alfred Lyall share this belief. I should like also to express my conviction of the truth of Sir Thomas's remarks about the native troops in the Indian army. If we have no confidence in them, they will have none in us or in themselves. The only remark I feel impelled to make which in any way approaches criticism of the excellent lecture to which we have listened is the statement that though the Asiatic knows no argument but force yet—(the same remark used to be made of the Tories in England)—yet England would not gain prestige in the Far East by closer alliance with Japan. But if the description of the Asiatic be, as it is, correct, would not the British position in the East be improved by the alliance with Japan? Sir Thomas was doubtful whether the Anglo-Japanese alliance would raise us much in the estimation of our friendly neighbours. But having seen the Japanese strike down the Russian, the Afghan must have been impressed by the prowess of Japan. There seems to me to be a slight discrepancy between the two statements. I should have thought that a closer alliance with Japan would have led to an increase of our prestige. We all believe that Russia's career has been checked by recent events in the Far East, but it is equally true that Russia has still the power to make things very unpleasant for us. She may not be able to consider the possibility of an aggressive movement against India, but she may make feints, and compel us to pour out money. India's condition is not such that she can pour out millions to further strengthen the strong frontier of Nature. A war with Russia may be popular with the best of the Indian troops, as Sir Thomas observed, but no war could be popular with the masses of the Indian people. They would not comprehend the position, nor would they be interested. Long ago they looked on, but continued to plough, while contending armies fought for the privilege of taxing them; and it would be the same to-day. Outside the army there is complete indifference, as was shown in the days of the Mutiny. When their own people were fighting the foreigner, they treated English refugees kindly.

The sudden and glorious uprising of Japan has caused an astonishment in the Western world which has been accentuated in England

by theatrical reminiscences. But those who knew Japan were fully aware of her proud chivalry, and of the patriotic spirit which animated her soldiers. The inculcation of patriotism begins with the children. Every Japanese child is fed on the forty-seven Ronin, and taught the practice of self-sacrifice. If we had not been led away by *The Mikado*, *The Geisha*, and other scenic representations of Japan, we should not have been so astonished to find that the comic opera did not represent actual life in those distant islands.

As to the loyalty to Britain of the Indian people, I agree ; but it must be remembered that millions of them only see one Englishman, and they cannot be expected to cherish the loyalty of races who are ruled by their own people. They are loyal to us as good governors, but I do not consider, though I should like to think it, that in the lump they are personally animated by an affectionate feeling for ourselves. One word more. When the understanding with Russia comes to pass, we must not forget the record of Russia in past understandings, and it will be well to keep our powder dry.

COLONEL YATE : Sir Thomas Holdich has touched upon many points in his admirable lecture, and it is impossible to discuss them all fully now. The principal point, however, is Russia's main road of advance to India by Herat and Kandahar. I may mention that Afghans, high and low, firmly believe an ancient tradition, which declares that a tremendous battle will one day take place on the great plain of Bakwa to the west of Kandahar. This plain is covered with grass, and is at present inhabited by a nomad population. There is plenty of forage. At the end of the fight it is said that 12,000 riderless horses will be galloping about the plain. I have tried to get at the origin of the tradition. It is said to be in writing, and I have given the author's name in my book on Khurasan and Seistan, but his writings are only in manuscript, and I was never able to obtain a copy. The author did not name the combatants in the great fight, but the Afghans have taken the prophecy as applying to Russia and England, and look forward to the day when the supremacy of Asia is to be decided on this Bakwa plain. As to the question of railways, there is no doubt that Russia will build railways, extending her present lines in Central Asia. This brings us to Mr. Balfour's memorable speech in which he recommended that the country should take its stand on the prohibition of railway construction by Russia in Afghanistan. We must naturally adhere to the present boundary, which has been delimited by joint British and Russian Commissions. Any advance beyond that should be considered a *casus belli*, but we should leave experts to work out the military problems. Sir Thomas Holdich has expressed great hope in the number of troops that we can raise

in India. There is a great deal of truth in what he has said, and also in his remarks about trust in our Indian soldiers. It does not seem to me that it would be necessary for enormous contingents to be sent from England in case of war with Russia; we can doubtless obtain material on the spot. We all agree, I think, as to the need for patriotic teaching in England. I consider that physical training and military exercises for the youth and accurate rifle-shooting should be obligatory. There is a regrettable lack of patriotic teaching of the youth in India, and in this matter we are in striking contrast with what Russia does to inculcate patriotism in her schools. I hope that with Lord Curzon's active interest in the cause of education due consideration will be given to this most important subject.

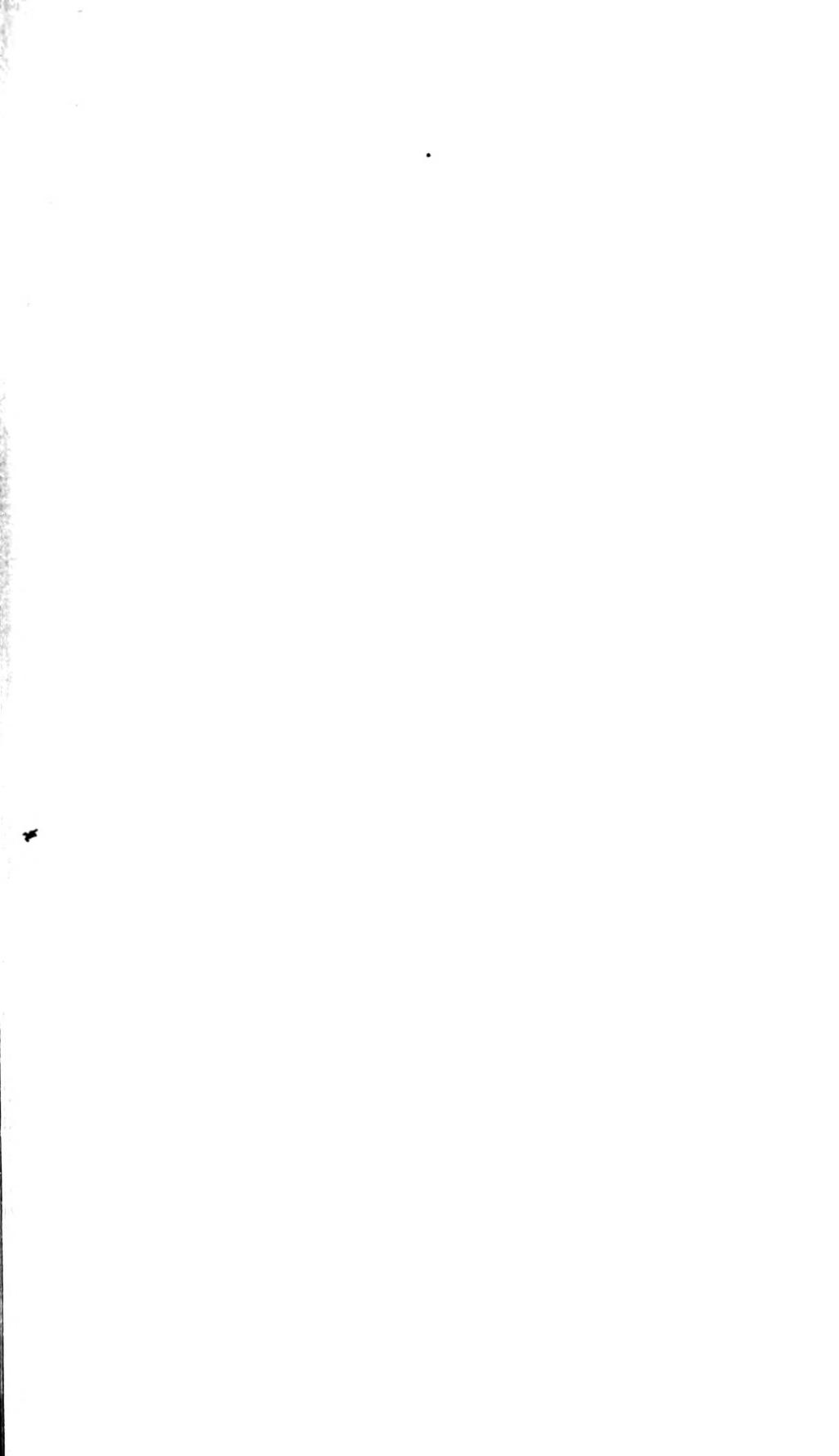
As to the Afghans wishing us to join them, I believe that they do so; but it must be remembered that there is a great and striking difference in the attitude in this respect between the Afghans who reside on the Russian and on the Indian frontiers. The Afghan of the Russian frontier is all in favour of British aid, but the nearer to British territory, the less the Afghan is anxious for our help. I do not consider it advisable for us to offer help to the Afghan too soon. Let us pull him out of the ditch when he is in it, not before.

MR. T. HART DAVIES: We are told that the Afghan looks upon the Russian as an enemy. I should like to know whether Sir Thomas Holdich considers it possible that Russia may offer Afghanistan an alliance with the plunder of India as an attraction. The Afghan has long had before him the hope of a march on Delhi. After Maiwand he thought he was helping in the invasion of India. Would it be possible for Russia to get Afghanistan on her side by the hope of loot from India? Few Russian officers, it appears to me, think of a direct attack upon India; they would take the line of least resistance. They wish to get to warm water, and Persia offers facilities. I apprehend that Russia's object would be to place Persia in the position of Manchuria before the war. Railways would be built, and a flank attack upon India would be difficult for us to meet. It is more likely that Russia would try to circumvent us through Persia than by an advance through Afghanistan. If she got at the Persian frontier it would make our position dangerous and awkward.

SIR THOMAS HOLDICH: In replying to the remarks which have been made on my paper, I must express my thanks for the kind way in which it has been received. As to an inducement offered to Afghanistan of Indian loot by Russia, I think that the day for such inducement is past. The Afghan Government must now be

reckoned as an educated Government. There was a time when such an appeal would have had great effect ; but Russia has been trusted by Afghanistan once or twice, and has proved a broken reed. There is now intercourse between the Afghan chiefs and India, and the proposition would have to come from one Government to the other ; an appeal could hardly be made to the populace generally. To reach warm water through Persia is certainly one of Russia's plans of operation, and she will adopt the way most easy of accomplishment to gain her end. We must certainly keep a look-out in Persia as well as in Western Afghanistan, and concentrate our attention on what is taking place. As other remarks coincided generally with my observations, I need not add anything more.

A vote of thanks to Sir Thomas Holdich, proposed by Sir Alfred Lyall, was enthusiastically received and unanimously carried.





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